

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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SUBJ: NEW CABINET APPOINTMENTS

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 2328

1. SUMMARY. IN A SMALL-SCALE RESHUFFLE OF HIS SUB-CABINET, PM HUSSEIN APPEARS TO BE CONSOLIDATING HIS POSITION IN UMNO AND PAS BY PROMOTING A NUMBER OF MALAYS TO NEW POSITIONS AS DEPUTY MINISTERS AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES. END SUMMARY.

2. PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN ANNOUNCED A NUMBER OF CABINET CHANGES APRIL 14. THE FOLLOWING PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES WERE PROMOTED TO DEPUTY MINISTERS:

SENATOR RAFIDAH AZIZ (UMNO), FINANCE (FORMERLY IN PUBLIC ENTERPRISES).

LEW SIP HON (MCA), PRIMARY INDUSTRIES.

K. PATHMANABAN (MIC), LABOR AND MANPOWER.

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MUSTAPHA ALI (PAS), SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT (FORMERLY IN TRADE AND INDUSTRY).

TWO NEW DEPUTY MINISTERS WERE BROUGHT INTO THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE FIRST TIME:

ABDUL MANAN OTHMAN (UMNO), PUBLIC ENTERPRISES.

HAJI SALLEH JAFARUDDIN (SARAWAK'S PBB -- PARTY PESAKA BUMIPUTRA BERSATU), EDUCATION. (HE WAS APPOINTED A SENATOR APRIL 14 TO ENABLE HIM TO TAKE THE POSITION.)

TWO OTHER MP'S WERE APPOINTED PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES:

HAJI EMBONG YAHAYA (UMNO), LAND AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

HAJI ABDUL WAHAB YUNOS (PAS), FINANCE. CULTURE, YOUTH AND SPORTS PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY ABDUL JALAL BIN ABU BAKAR (UMNO) WAS SHIFTED TO THE SAME POSITION AT DEFENSE.

3. THESE CHANGES MEAN THAT ONLY THE FOREIGN, WELFARE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES DO NOT HAVE DEPUTY MINISTERS. THREE NEW MINISTRIES -- PRIMARY INDUSTRIES, EDUCATION AND FINANCE -- HAVE TWO DEPUTY MINISTERS EACH. (AGRICULTURE AND THE PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT ALREADY HAD TWO DEPUTIES.)

4. THIS CABINET SHUFFLE IS INTERESTING IN SEVERAL RESPECTS. MOST OF THE NEWLY PROMOTED OR APPOINTED DEPUTY MINISTERS AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES ARE MALAYS; ONLY TWO NON-MALAYS WERE INCLUDED AMONG THE EIGHT. TWO OF THE APPOINTMENTS FILLED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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POSITIONS MADE VACANT BY THE RESIGNATION AND SUBSEQUENT ARRESTS OF ABDULLAH AHMAD (DEPUTY MINISTER FOR SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT) AND ABDULLAH MAJID (DEPUTY MINISTER OF LABOR AND MANPOWER). OF THE THREE MINISTRIES GIVEN A SECOND DEPUTY MINISTER, THE CHANGE IN PRIMARY INDUSTRIES WAS APPARENTLY A TECHNOCAL ONE TO ALLOW LEW SIP HON TO CONCENTRATE ON RUBBER MATTERS AND THE INCUMBENT PAUL LEONG TO WORK ON TIN. THE OTHER TWO CHANGES, THOUGH, ADDED MALAY DEPUTY MINISTERS TO BALANCE CHINESE DEPUTIES IN IMPORTANT MINISTRIES (THE INCUMBENTS IN FINANCE AND EDUCATION WERE MCA'S RICHARD HO AND CHAN SIANG SUN). FINALLY, OF THE THREE MINISTRIES WHICH STILL DO NOT HAVE DEPUTIES, THE MFA HAS TRADITIONALLY NEVER HAD ONE, WHILE THE PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT (LING LIONG SIK, MCA) AND WELFARE (PATRICK ANAK UREN, SARAWAK NATIONAL PARTY) ARE

CONSPICUOUSLY NON-MALAYS.

5. COMMENT. OUR PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE CABINET CHANGES IS THAT PM HUSSEIN SEEMS TO BE CONSOLIDATING HIS POSITION AMONG THE MALAY PARTIES OF THE NATIONAL FRONT BY PROMOTING A SIGNIFICANT NUMBER OF UMNO AND PAS MEMBERS. WE WERE TOLD BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE SECRETARY OF THE MCA THAT THERE WERE A NUMBER OF LAST MINUTE ADDITIONS TO THE LIST OF PROMOTIONS AND WE SURMISE THAT THESE WERE MOSTLY MALAYS SINCE THE SPECULATION (REFTEL) ON THE CHANGES INDICATED A RACIALLY MORE BALANCED LIST. WE ALSO NOTE THE ABSENCE OF ANY BERJAYA MP'S ON THE PROMOTION LIST. THIS FAILURE SUGGESTS A NUMBER OF POSSIBILITIES. ONE IS THAT BERJAYA LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HAS NO ONE OF SUFFICIENT STATURE IN PARLIAMENT TO ENTER THE GOVERNMENT. ANOTHER IS THAT KUALA LUMPUR IS TRYING TO AVOID BEING FURTHER DRAWN INTO THE CONTINUING SPAT BETWEEN BERJAYA AND USNO IN SABAH EVEN THOUGH THIS MEANS BERJAYA REMAINS UNREPRESENTED IN THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT. UNDERHILL

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